

# Exhibit A-28

## Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 4 September 2014, 08:00 hrs)

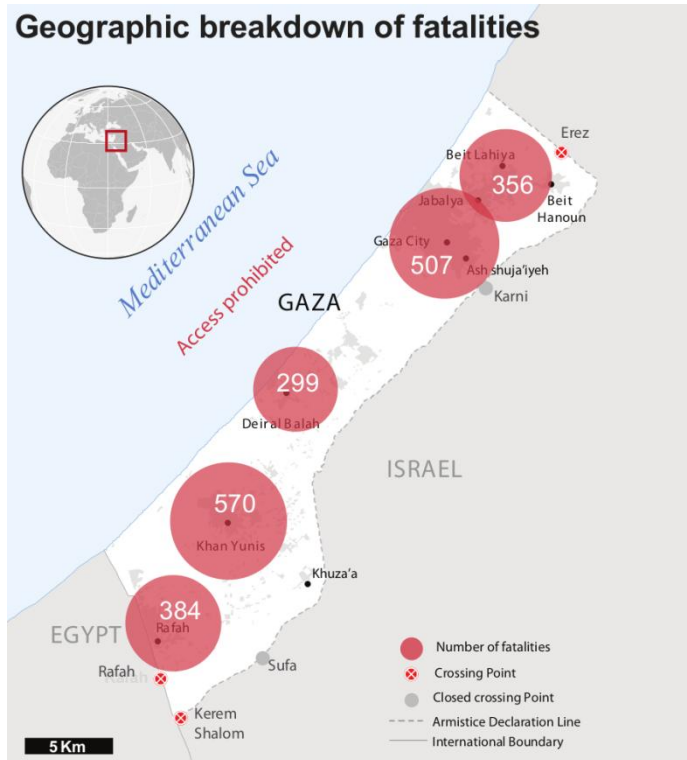


This report is produced by OCHA oPt in collaboration with humanitarian partners. This report covers the period from 28 August (08:00 hrs) to 4 September (08:00 hrs).

## Highlights

- The open-ended ceasefire which entered into force on 26 August is holding, with no violations reported.
- The Palestinian fatality toll is 2,131, of whom 1,473 have been identified as civilians, including 501 children, according to preliminary assessments.
- Approximately 110,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) still remain in UNRWA emergency shelters and with host families.
- 18,000 housing units have been either destroyed or severely damaged, leaving approximately 108,000 people homeless.
- 450,000 people are unable to access municipal water due to infrastructure damage and/or low pressure.

(Map as of 29 August).



**2,131**

Palestinians killed, including 1,473 civilians, of whom 501 are children and 257 are women.<sup>1</sup>

**71**

Israelis killed, including 66 soldiers, a security coordinator and four civilians. One foreign national civilian was also killed in Israel.

**110,000**

IDPs remain in UNRWA emergency shelters or with host families.

**18,000**

Housing units destroyed or severely damaged, leaving approximately 108,000 people homeless.

**450,000**

People unable to access municipal water due to damage and/or low pressure.

## Situation Overview

The open-ended ceasefire which entered into force on 26 August continues to hold. The scale of damage resulting from the 50-day escalation in hostilities is unprecedented since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. All governorates in Gaza witnessed extensive aerial bombardment, naval shelling and artillery fire, resulting in the widespread loss of life and livelihoods. Damage to public infrastructure was also unprecedented, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without adequate services, including electricity, clean water and quality healthcare.

<sup>1</sup> Data on fatalities and destruction of property is consolidated by the Protection and Shelter clusters based on preliminary information, and is subject to change based on further verifications.

+ For more information, see “background on the crisis” at the end of the report

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**Coordination Saves Lives**

The Gaza Power Plant (GPP) remains inoperable following an Israeli airstrike on 29 July and despite extensive repairs, electricity outages of 18 hours a day continue in most areas across Gaza. Extensive damage to the water and wastewater system means that 20 to 30 per cent of households, or 450,000 people, remain unable to access municipal water due to damage and/or low pressure. Following the ceasefire there was a steep decline in the number of internally displaced persons, but figures have gradually risen again in UNRWA shelters, and an estimated 110,000 are still displaced, including with host families. Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) are a major protection concern and pose a risk to those returning to their homes and involved in repair and reconstruction activities.

The majority of the Gaza population has lost its productive assets. According to the Palestinian Federation of Industries, 419 businesses and workshops were damaged, with 128 completely destroyed. With limited activity at the commercial crossings and extensive damage to private infrastructure and other productive assets, business activities were largely paralyzed during the operation. Hostilities forced farmers and herders to abandon their lands, and resulted in substantial direct damage to Gaza's 17,000 hectares of croplands as well as much of its agricultural infrastructure, including greenhouses, irrigation systems, animal farms, fodder stocks and fishing boats. Access to the sea was also prohibited for most of the 50 days of hostilities; restrictions have been restored to the six nautical mile limit, but there have been reports of shooting at, and detaining, fishermen in recent days, reportedly for exceeding this limit.

These losses come on top of an already fragile economy and livelihoods. Around 66 per cent of the population of Gaza was receiving food assistance prior to the crisis and the household food insecurity level or vulnerable to food insecure stood at 72 per cent of households. Unemployment has increased dramatically since mid-2013, following a halt of the illegal tunnel trade with Egypt, soaring from 28 per cent in the third quarter (Q3) of 2013 to 45 per cent in Q2 2014; almost 70 per cent of the youth aged 20-24 were unemployed in Gaza in Q2 2014. It is expected that labour market conditions in Gaza will further deteriorate following the conflict, exacerbating the impact of the blockade and the longstanding access restrictions imposed by Israel which have been preventing any meaningful economic activity.

In addition to shelter solutions, the main priority for humanitarian agencies continues to be the repair and reconstruction and the restoration of essential services to affected communities, which effectively means the entire population of the Gaza Strip. However, this will not be possible without a more permanent agreement that will allow for the entry of the materials needed to re-build homes, schools and hospitals, to repair roads, electricity lines and water and sanitation networks and bring about transformational change in Gaza.

*Going back to the status quo ante won't solve the problem, it will only defer it for another day. It will not stop the bloodshed, it will make it even worse the next time the cycle rolls over the people of Gaza and plagues the people of Israel. Gaza is an open wound and Band Aids won't help. There must be a plan after the aftermath that allows Gaza to breathe and heal.*

**UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, 21 July.**

#### *Hostilities and casualties*

The cumulative death toll among Palestinians as a result of the hostilities is at least 2,131 according to preliminary data collected by the Protection Cluster from various sources, including 379 persons who could not be yet identified or their status established. Of the initially verified cases, 1,473 are believed to be civilians, including 501 children and 257 women; 279 members of armed groups. Many fatalities involved multiple family members, with at least 142 Palestinian families having three or more members killed in the same incident, for a total of 739 fatalities. Approximately 25 Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel have reportedly been killed in Gaza by armed groups since 21 August (not included in the fatality toll above).

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, as of 26 August, 11,100 Palestinians, including 3,374 children and 2,088 women and 410 elderly, have been injured. Preliminary estimates indicate that up to 1,000 of the children injured will have a permanent disability and up to 1,500 orphaned children will need sustained support from the child protection and welfare sectors.

The cumulative Israeli fatality toll is 71, of whom 66 were soldiers, one security coordinator, and four were civilians, including one child; one foreign national civilian was also killed in Israel. Dozens of other Israelis, including at least six children, were directly injured by rockets or shrapnel.

#### *Displacement*

At the height of the conflict, an estimated 485,000 people – twenty-eight per cent of the population of Gaza – were internally displaced, including in UNRWA schools designated as emergency shelters (290,000), government schools (15,000), in informal shelters such as empty buildings, churches or mosques, and with host families (170,000), representing 28 per cent of the population of Gaza. The numbers decreased during the extended period of temporary ceasefires between 11 and 19 August, but soared again to 475,000 prior to the 26 August open-ended ceasefire.

Following the ceasefire there was a dramatic decline in the number of IDPs, with the numbers in UNRWA designated shelters decreased from 289,000 to 53,000 between 26 and 27 August. However, the numbers have been climbing gradually again with

some 60,812 registered in 31 UNRWA shelters as of yesterday evening - higher than the number of displaced sheltered during the peak of the 'Cast Lead' hostilities in December 2008/January 2009. The reason for the increase appears to be a movement from government shelters – most of which have now closed – and host families to UNRWA shelters. An estimated 50,000 are staying with host families and 700 sheltering in two government schools.

#### *WASH*

The water and wastewater situation in Gaza was already critical before the emergency, due to continued over-pumping and contamination of the coastal aquifer, and continual electricity and fuel shortages. Water and wastewater services were further hampered during the war, due to aggravations of electricity and fuel shortages and the inaccessibility of many wells, pumping stations, and other facilities within the Israeli declared buffer zone. Despite the improved access to these areas following the cessation of hostilities, services remain affected due to the damage sustained to some facilities, including the Gaza Power Plant (GPP).

An initial Damage Assessment Report (DAR) by the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) indicates that 12 per cent of wells have been destroyed or damaged, particularly in Gaza City, Beit Hanoun, and Deir al Balah municipalities. Agricultural and standby wells, typically with lower water quality and no chlorination, have been used by many municipalities to supplement water supplies and replace damaged wells. The DAR further identified over 33,000 metres of damaged water and wastewater networks but the figure does not include northern Gaza, which was either inaccessible or covered with rubble at the time of the report. The DAR also indicates that five per cent of main lines, three per cent of distribution lines, and 12 per cent of household connections have been damaged. There have been complaints about water quality in Rafah and Gaza municipalities, with particular concerns about sewage entering water pipes due to damage. Wastewater treatment plants in Beit Lahiya and Gaza City are not fully functioning due to damage in the plants themselves or to pressure lines. Consequently, raw sewage is discharging directly to sea or infiltrating into sand dunes. Although solid waste is being collected in most areas, it is less frequent than usual and is gathered in temporary sites within communities rather than dumped in designated landfills.

CMWU has been actively repairing damage and addressed about 80 percent of the priority repairs, focusing on those affecting the greatest number of people. Despite this, current estimates are that 20 to 30 percent of households, or 450,000 people, remain unable to access municipal water due to damage and/or low pressure. Additionally, many of these repairs are temporary and will require longer term repair after emergency works are completed. The reduction in network pressure due to damage and power cuts are also reducing the availability of water to households, with the result that the number of pumping hours reported by municipalities does not always correspond with the hours households receive water. Additionally, households which do not have electricity and/or supplemental pumps cannot fill rooftop storage tanks when water is available.

#### *Shelter*

An estimated five per cent of the entire housing stock in Gaza is uninhabitable - 18,000 housing units have been either destroyed or severely damaged, leaving approximately 108,000 people homeless. This is in addition to the pre-crisis housing deficit of 71,000 housing units, due to people living in overcrowded or inadequate conditions.

Assessment teams from UNRWA, UNDP, and the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MPWH) will conduct detailed damage assessment in all locations starting next week. UNRWA and UNDP teams will conduct detailed damage assessment for shelters of refugee and non-refugee families respectively. Joint teams including UNRWA, UNDP and MPWH will be formed for quality control and appeals.

#### *Health*

Gaza's health system suffers from chronic shortages in medicine, medical supplies and equipment and there have been limited training opportunities for staff. The energy crisis and the lack of financial support for the Ministry of Health had negatively impacted the continuity and quality of services prior to the recent emergency.

Over the past week a number of health facilities that had been closed throughout the hostilities have re-opened and are providing services, however, suffering from the same chronic conditions as previously with regard to lack of electricity, shortage of drug supplies and equipment. As of 3 September, three out of 32 hospitals remain closed with a further three having opened with limited service capacity; 24 out of 97 primary health centres (PHCs) remain closed. The closure of the PHCs has resulted in the overburdening of facilities in their vicinity, causing long waiting hours and considerable strain on staff and supplies. With 50 PHCs and 17 hospitals having reported damage to their infrastructure there is urgent need to repair and reopen facilities to ensure basic services are met in all five Gaza governorates.

#### *Education*

All 474,000 children enrolled in government, UNRWA or private primary and secondary schools and 55,003 children enrolled in kindergartens, as well as 30,002 university-aged youths, have been affected by the conflict. Twenty-two schools were completely destroyed and 118 schools damaged by conflict. UNRWA has reported at least 75 damaged school buildings. Many of the higher education facilities, including the Islamic University in Gaza, have also been affected. The education sector was already overstretched prior to the crisis, suffering from a shortage of almost 200 schools, with classes running in double shifts.

The new school year was scheduled to start on 24 August, but has been postponed to 14 September. When schools open, children will face even more acute over-crowding and under-resourcing as a result of the collateral damage suffered. Priorities are ERW clearance and the rehabilitation of schools from damage sustained and because of their employment as emergency shelters for IDPs. Furniture, textbooks and learning materials will also need to be replaced. Transportation is also a concern as students and teachers may need to travel some distance to schools, due to displacement or damaged schools. Additionally, with hundreds of thousands of children in need of psychosocial support (PSS), teachers and educational staff (many of whom have also experienced acute trauma) will be stretched to provide the appropriate support required to ease children back in to school and to provide ongoing support throughout the school year.

*Key humanitarian priorities:*

Temporary shelter and housing solutions to IDPs: immediate and short term plans to accommodate the tens of thousands of families who were rendered homeless are urgently needed.

Sustained opening of crossings: is vital, alongside the removal of restrictions on the entry of materials for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW): rapid clearance of built-up areas and critical facilities, as well as awareness raising campaigns amongst the most vulnerable, are urgently needed.

Additional fuel supply: fuel is needed to operate backup generators at essential facilities, including water, sanitation and health, for long hours.

**Erez**: Open for movement during normal working hours (08:00-16:00).

**Beit Hanoun (Arba-Arba)**: Operational.

**Kerem Shalom**: Open as per its regular operating hours (08:00-16:00).

**Rafah**: Open from 09:00 to 15:00 for Egyptian citizens; conflict injuries; critical medical cases (non-conflict related); foreign residency card holders; those with third country visas; and dual nationals.

## Humanitarian needs and response



### Needs

- At least 373,000 children require direct and specialized psychosocial support (PSS). Children are showing symptoms of increasing distress, including bed wetting, clinging to parents and nightmares.
- Specifically, there is a need to increase the number of structured activities and specialized PSS support, as opposed to PSS first aid, for children and families identified as requiring a referral to such services.
- Up to 1,500 orphaned children will need sustained support from the child protection and welfare sectors.
- Thousands of explosive remnants of war (ERW) infest civilian areas affected by conflict, causing a major threat, especially to children, farmers, humanitarian workers and IDPs returning home. UN premises have also been contaminated by ERW.

### Response

- Protection Cluster members are investigating incidents to identify possible violations of international law, as well as consolidating information on civilian fatalities.
- CPWG partners are providing PSS interventions in shelters and in host families.
- PRCS continues to provide PSS interventions through UNWRA and governmental schools/shelters.
- UNICEF has reached 750,000 people in Gaza with life-saving and child protection SMS text messages, targeting the most vulnerable communities in Gaza.
- The Sawa Child Protection Helpline has thus far provided counselling to a total of 2,812 callers.

- Since 8 July, UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) has conducted 16,084 PSS sessions for parents and recreational activities for children. CMHP also coordinated and supervised the implementation of sessions by other partners. Numbers of reached beneficiaries are currently being updated.
- CFTA has organized open days in the Khan Yunis and Tomoh has conducted five open days in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Radwan of Gaza city; both are providing PSS support through structured group activities to the communities of Ad Darraj, Northern Remal, Jabalia El Balad, Deir al Balah, and Khan Yunis.
- Since 27 July, UNMAS has conducted 147 risk assessments in all governorates in places such as schools, health facilities, food distribution centres and the Rafah crossing.
- 17 Risk Education Sessions have been conducted by UNMAS, reaching 1,488 persons, including 478 humanitarian workers from NGOs and UN agencies.
- More than 50,000 ERW awareness flyers have been distributed to IDPs by UNRWA and UNMAS, as well as to all people living or working in and around the infrastructures assed by UNMAS.
- An estimated 1 million of people have been indirectly reached by radio spots, safety SMS messages and/or TV spots.

#### **Gaps and Constraints**

- Major electricity outages continue to hamper communication with staff and partners on the ground. Most child protection services remain closed.
- Core child protection interventions to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation are limited and systems to detect, prevent and respond to cases of child abuse in shelters and host communities remain weak.



#### **Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)**

##### **Needs**

- It is estimated that about 18,000 families (consisting of approximately 108,000 individuals) whose homes were totally destroyed or heavily damaged are in need of transitional shelter support, as well as emergency NFI kits. In the medium term, they will require cash assistance to cover rental fees and basic household items.
- Emergency shelter repair items are needed for about 5,800 families (34,800 individuals), whose homes were damaged but are still inhabitable. Another 38,000 families (an estimated 228,000 individuals), whose homes sustained minor damage need basic NFI assistance such as nylon and plastic sheets.
- Household and hygiene NFIs are required for individuals in collective centres, host family situations and other locations of displacement.
- Emergency shelter materials to support individuals in collective centres and host family situations are required to provide some basic level of privacy in crowded conditions.

##### **Response**

- As of yesterday, about 60,000 people were provided with shelter in 31 designated UNRWA schools across the Gaza Strip and an estimated 50,000 with IDPs are hosted with relatives.
- Shelter and WASH partners have provided household NFIs to 57,572 families and hygiene NFIs to 118,630 families since the beginning of the emergency. Standard household NFI kits include two mattresses and four blankets. Sometimes kitchen sets are also included; IDPs residing in shelter do not normally receive kitchen sets since there is no available capacity to cook. Such items are normally distributed to either IDPs with hosting families or those residing in damaged, but still inhabitable houses. Standard hygiene NFI kits usually include soap, shampoos, toothpaste, tooth brushes, towels, tissues and basic cleaning supplies.

#### **Gaps and Constraints**

- More assessment is needed to identify the current needs of IDP at shelters or host families, and of people who returned to their homes.





## Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

### Needs

- On average, 20 to 30 per cent of water networks remain significantly damaged.
- Wastewater networks are similarly affected, with 20 to 30 per cent damages.
- The majority of communities report that people do not have sufficient hygiene items. Additional items requested include lice treatment shampoo, cleaning supplies for shelters and households, and underwear for women and girls.

### Response

- PWA, CMWU and municipalities are coordinating and progressing with damage repair to WASH facilities and major damages in pipelines.
- Over 350,000 beneficiaries have received potable water through trucking from ACF, OXFAM, PU, Save the Children and UNICEF.
- Over 24,000 beneficiaries have received municipal water through trucking from ACF, Save and UNICEF.
- Overall, response activities include: support to network and facilities repair, generators and spare parts, consumables (including chlorine), potable water trucking, domestic water trucking, provision of bulk storage (tanks) and HH storage (jerry cans), set up of public distribution points, bottled water, water vouchers, hygiene kits and hygiene promotion.

### Gaps and Constraints

- The problematic area for WASH response now lies within communities and neighborhoods east of Salah ad Deen Road, which have been partially or completely destroyed. For those areas which require urban or rural planning / master plans, service providers depend upon comprehensive reconstruction plans in order to re-design the water and sanitation network.



## Health and Nutrition

### Needs

- Health facilities damaged and/or closed have hindered the delivery of health services. A number of health facilities which had been closed throughout the hostilities re-opened during the reporting period. As of yesterday, three of the 32 hospitals and 24 of the 97 primary health care centres in the Gaza Strip remained closed according to the Ministry of Health.

### Response

- Health service providers are conducting default tracing of children who have missed their vaccination requirements during the past two months.
- Several partners are providing static PHC services where health facilities have been destroyed and mobile clinics continue to support the compromised health system throughout Gaza.
- Health posts remain installed in all remaining shelters, providing basic health care to about 60,000 people.
- The early warning system for communicable disease is established in most health facilities and currently not reporting any major public health concerns.
- Since the beginning of the Gaza crisis, UNRWA's health centres have recorded more than 650,000 patient visits, including maternal health care visits, child visits, such as for example for immunization, visits by people with non-communicable diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes, and about 388,000 visits to seek medical care for acute and common illnesses.

### Gaps and Constraints

- Health centres are suffering from chronic problems such as lack of electricity and shortage of drugs, including those which have re-opened during the last week.



## Needs

- IDPs are in need of food and other immediate assistance.
- The entire population of Gaza has been affected by the conflict and almost all need food and other assistance to recover.
- Over 100,000 people whose homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair will need food and other assistance for a longer term.
- The lack of electricity limits the storage capacity for fresh food for both shops and households. Bakeries face challenges with their generators and fuel stock.
- WFP requires approximately US\$ 63 million for emergency humanitarian response in Gaza for a period of three months, in addition to funds for regular programmes.
- Humanitarian access to allow for provision of food and other emergency assistance to the civilian population should be consistently assured.

## Response

- The regular food assistance to more than one million UNRWA and WFP core beneficiaries is ongoing.
- In addition, approximately 690,000 out of around 730,000 people have been reached by the one-time exceptional food distribution to affected families who are not receiving regular food assistance implemented by UNRWA, WFP and the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- Food assistance for those people who have their houses totally or severely damaged is ongoing.
- WFP and partners are working to support the opening of schools with an emergency school meals programme.
- WFP, in cooperation with UNRWA, is providing ready-to-eat emergency food rations to IDPs in UNRWA and government shelters on a daily basis.
- WFP continues to provide food assistance to IDPs hosted with relatives and to some 2,000 patients and hospital staff.
- Between 26 August and 2 September, a total of 30 WFP trucks crossed from Israel into Gaza through Kerem Shalom cargo.
- On 27 August and on 2 September, two WFP humanitarian convoys successfully crossed from Egypt into the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, carrying a combined load of 25,000 food parcels, enough to feed approximately 150,000 people for five days.



## Needs

- Twenty-two schools were completely destroyed and 118 schools damaged by conflict.
- The current ceasefire must last so that unexploded ordnance clearance, damage assessments and repair work to damaged educational facilities, as well as preparation for the new school year, can take place.

## Response

- Preparations for the new school year, which is set to start on 14 September following a three-week delay, are ongoing.
- UNRWA, in coordination with MoEHE and partners, planned to implement a three-phase back-to-school plan in war torn Gaza this week, to help students and teachers start to transition into a new school year. The plan includes PSS interventions, and implementing a new technology, UNRWA's satellite TV education programs and self-learning material for all children.
- The Education Cluster is also working with service providers to coordinate a special package for returning school students, with a focus on PSS support and recreational activities.
- UNMAS is assessing all schools affected by the conflict for UXOs in order to allow children to restart school in the coming days. ERW risk education is being prepared to be integrated in official educational curriculum.



### Gaps & Constraints

- Inadequate funding for cluster activities.
- The need for longer-term shelter for tens of thousands of IDPs will present significant challenges to the operation of schools currently being used as shelters.



### Logistics

#### Needs

- Unrestricted movement of humanitarian cargo from the West Bank and Israel to the Gaza Strip is required.
- Safe and secure humanitarian space to ensure transportation and distribution within the Gaza Strip of relief supplies is needed.

#### Response

- During the reporting period, the Logistics Cluster facilitated the transportation of 1,360 pallets of supplies into the Gaza Strip, supporting the work of 16 organizations.
- Logistics Cluster has provided the humanitarian community three dedicated warehouses and one refrigerated warehouse inside the Gaza Strip.
- Logistics Cluster has also provided five staging areas available in Jerusalem, Hebron, Ashqelon, Ramallah and Nablus for consolidation, palletisation, loading and dispatch.
- Logistics Cluster facilitates coordination of transport services.

#### Gaps and Constraints

- Cargo transported via the Beitunia crossing from the West Bank into Israel is experiencing significant delays due to limited capacity.
- Cargo transported via the Tarqumia crossing from the West Bank into Israel is experiencing delays due to increasing number of trucks and complex security procedures.

## General Coordination

The data collection for the Multi-Cluster Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment (MIRA), led by the EOC has been completed. Clusters and sectors have completed analysis of the data generated from the two level needs assessments, which covered both the governorate and municipal levels. A report summarizing the main findings of the MIRA will be released next week.

The Humanitarian Coordinator and the Deputy Prime Minister discussed the necessary complementarity and coordination between the Humanitarian Appeal (Gaza Crisis Appeal) and the Government-led 100 Day Plan. A joint presentation to donors by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Humanitarian Coordinator of the revised Gaza Crisis Appeal is scheduled for 9 September in Ramallah.

## Funding

Based on information available, partners have so far received approximately \$186 million for their projects in the appeal. This is largely made up however, of funding to a few big UN agencies. Despite reasonable to good funding to these larger UN agencies, many humanitarian partners working in critical areas have received little to no funding for their Crisis Appeal interventions, including national NGOs who are key partners on the ground. Particular attention must be paid to key sectors for example Health, WASH, Education and Protection, which have been underfunded to date. Much more funding is also needed in Shelter and Food Security given the size of the request.

According to FTS, up to \$171 million has been directed outside the appeal (committed and pledged) since the start of the Crisis, the bulk of which destined for Gaza. Of the funding reported outside the appeal, the majority has been from Gulf-based donors (\$125 million), with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the largest contributor (\$80 million).

A revised Gaza Crisis appeal is due to be issued shortly.

The Emergency Response Fund (ERF) is an additional mechanism available to fund interventions in Gaza through rapid and flexible support to affected civilian populations. The ERF has begun processing project applications in regards to the Gaza emergency. To date, 13 project proposals were approved for a total of US \$3.1 million. Further funding for the ERF is still being sought.

UN humanitarian agencies, in cooperation with NGO partners have applied to the CERF Rapid Response window to cover urgent needs in food assistance, psychosocial support, WASH, rubble removal and critical drugs.

### Background to the crisis

On 7 July 2014, the Israeli army launched a large military operation in the Gaza Strip, codenamed “Protective Edge”, with the stated objective of stopping Palestinian rocket firing at southern Israel and destroying the military infrastructure of Hamas and other armed groups.

This development marked the collapse of the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire understanding reached between Israel and Hamas in November 2012, which has been gradually undermined since December 2013. The latest escalation round started in early June, characterized by an intensification of Israeli airstrikes and rockets launched from Gaza at southern Israel. Tensions further increased following the abduction and killing of three Israeli youths in the southern West Bank, on 12 June, which the Israeli government attributed to Hamas. Overall, in the period leading up to the start of the current operation a total of 15 Palestinians, including one civilian, were killed, and another 58 others, mostly civilians, injured, as a result of Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip; seven Israelis, five of whom were civilians, were injured due to rocket fire.

The current crisis comes against a backdrop of heightened vulnerability and instability. Unemployment increased dramatically since mid-2013, following a halt of the illegal tunnel trade, exacerbating the impact of the Israeli blockade in place since June

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2007. Additionally, former de facto government employees, including the security forces, have not been paid salaries regularly since August 2013 and no salaries at all since April 2014. Delivery of basic services has been also undermined due to an ongoing energy crisis, involving power outages of 12 hours per day.

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